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ABSTRACT

In this two-page information review on relationships between schools and businesses, the following questions are discussed: (1) How are corporations involved with education? (2) What are the benefits to education of educational activities supported by corporations? (3) What risks are associated with corporate involvement in education? (4) What strategies characterize successful school-business partnerships? and (5) How does corporate involvement benefit schools of education? Nineteen references are lised. (JD)

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THE EFFECTS OF CORPORATE INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

by Francie Gilman

Today, educators and corporate executives are under more pressure than ever before to find ways to work together to solve problems. Schools and teachers alone cannot resolve the crisis in educational quality as described in a myriad of reports and studies; similarly, business alone cannot meet the challenges of technological advance and corresponding shortage of skilled personnel. Although cooperative programs involving schools and businesses are not new, interest in such programs is mounting, as evidenced by the programs' scope and variety; the increasing amount of resources that businesses devote to them; and encouragement from such groups as the President's Task Force on Private Sector Initiatives, the insurance industry's Center for Corporate Public Involvement, and the computer industry.

How are corporations involved with education?

Corporations may become involved with schools on a local basis through programs such as Adopt-A-School, in which an adopting organization provides resources (staff, materials, and/or financial support) to a grade, department, or entire school (Ozmon 1982; Hart 1981). For example, employees of John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Co. participate in English and mathematics tutorial programs in Hancock's adopted school in Boston, with the goal of "showing the kids that people are interested in how they're doing in school . . . and trying to get them to finish school" ("English, Math . . . " 1983). This kind of partnership recently received a boost from President Reagan when he announced that the White House had adopted a local elementary school (Yoch 1983).

Corporations also donate or discount equipment and training. Apple, Atari, Radio Shack (Tandy Co.), and Hewlett-Packard offer programs for educators from all grade levels; these programs promote use of the companies' computer terminals and compatible software, broaden their markets, and help respond to the growing demand for educational technology (Mathieson 1982; Roach 1983).

In another variation on business involvement in education, many corporations, motivated by their need for competitively skilled employees, hire teachers to conduct training programs for their employees. According to Fauri (1982), these programs can provide employment alternatives for teachers, although Elfenbein (1982) and Wallington (1981) cited difficulties in such skill transfers.

What are the benefits to education of educational activities supported by corporations?

The education profession has regarded corporate involvement in education both as a welcome source of assistance and challenge and as a threat. The stated goal of most collaborative and philanthropic efforts by corporations is to improve the quality of education, thereby improving the quality of the work force for the good of society. Boyer, in High School (1982), noted the interdependence of business and education and proposed five areas in which businesses and schools should work together for mutual benefit: helping the educationally disadvantaged through special projects; providing advanced instruction and trips for the educationally gifted; supporting excellence in teaching and offering teacher instruction; supplementing vocational education courses with hands-on experience; and providing management and logistical support assistance to principals. Rexnord, Inc., a Milwaukee-based machinery-parts firm that hires teachers for six weeks each summer to give them business experience, found that teachers' self-image improved as a result of exposure to the business world (National School Public Relations Association 1980).

What risks are associated with corporate involvement in education?

Critics of corporate involvement in education have charged that business cooperates in education only as a means of self-promotion, and that such cooperation thereby threatens educational quality and integrity (Ozmon 1982; Santee 1983). Hansen and Schergens (1982) refuted the contention that all businesses use schools for their own ends, but warned that "partnerships should not be ties that blind."

A more subtle form of corporate influence in education is the part corporations play in drawing teachers--particularly math and science teachers--away from public schools (Proceedings . . . 1982). Private industry's higher wages, career ladders, and need for skilled trainers represent a lure few schools can match.

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What strategies characterize successful school-business partnerships?

As in any cooperative venture, school-business partnerships require careful planning. Boyer (1982) gave four guiding principles: (1) businesses should enrich the school program, not control it; (2) goals should be realistic, with concrete objectives that can be attained within a finite period; (3) a clear division of labor should be established, with each partner acting in its area of expertise; and (4) cooperation should be rooted in mutual respect. Griffin (1983), in addressing programs at the community-college level, cited the importance of faculty involvement and support. A manual by Schilit and Lacey (1982) profiled 55 successful programs; a guide by the National School Public Relations Association (1980) described some successful school-business partnerships and offered advice on operation of such programs.

How does corporate involvement benefit schools of education?

Although business recognizes the important role of teachers in motivating and leading students (Roach 1983), most schools of education are not reaping the corporate grants that other professional schools receive. "Corporate money tends to go to the academic haves, rather than the have-nots . . . primarily undergraduate schools do not attract the big bucks, and the gap is widening" (Hancock 1983). Corporate gifts are more likely to go to a school that will provide a patentable resource, enhance a product, or train future employees. From that point of view, educating teachers is not as high a priority as educating chemists, engineers, and computer scientists.

On the other hand, Hewlett-Packard Co. has committed $6 million to encouraging students to obtain doctoral degrees in electrical engineering or computer science and then teach at the college level ("Hewlett-Packard . . . " 1983, p. 11). Cooperative programs involving schools of education and business, perhaps leading to a degree in teaching in nonschool settings or to the development of new teacher education courses or materials, can expand the professional horizon (McCormick 1983; Levine 1982).

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